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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the two 1998 issues of a semiannual newsletter that provides current information and research on the professional world of early childhood administration. The Summer 1998 edition provides a "Profile of Early Childhood Center Directors." This profile finds that: (1) individuals were promoted to directorships because others saw leadership ability; (2) state licensing standards do not require formal preparation for center directors; (3) few opportunities for specialized training in administration; (4) most directors are eager for support; (5) directors receive poor pay; (6) more directors are pursuing degrees in early childhood education; (7) deep commitment to early childhood education; and (8) directors are less likely to leave their positions than other child care personnel. The Fall 1998 issue presents the article "Investment in Directors' Training Yields Big Payoffs." The article examines data from two models of director training which provide evidence that well-trained directors run higher quality programs. Drawing from these studies, the article indicates that there are improvements in directors' perceptions of competence, in organizational climate, and in classroom quality. Conclusions based on these studies include that the greater the investment of training dollars, the better the outcomes for programs, and that continued effort in the director credential movement and broadened professional development opportunities for early childhood administrators is necessary. (SD)

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Research Notes

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A Profile of Early Childhood Center Directors

Research conducted by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership and other organizations provides rich data on the professional world of early childhood administrators. Here is some of what we have learned.

- Most directors were promoted to their current positions because others saw their leadership ability and encouraged them to pursue the positions.

  Approximately 90% of directors have been classroom teachers, but only one-fifth report that they always knew they wanted to become a director of a center and actively pursued the position.[1] In a study of 840 Illinois directors, 55% indicated that they were encouraged (and often coaxed) to take on the director's job.[2] The lack of a well-articulated career ladder in the field means that most directors serendipitously fall into their positions; few follow a planned career path.

- State licensing standards do not require adequate formal preparation for center directors. Few directors have had training in program administration, staff management, fiscal and legal issues, organizational change, or group dynamics prior to assuming their administrative roles.

  Illinois, for example, does not require directors to take a single course in the administration of early childhood programs. Only four states require any specialized management training for center directors prior to their assuming their administrative roles.[3] A 1989 study of 990 directors found that 38% of directors had not had a single course relating to the management of educational programs in preparation for their job.[4]

- Few opportunities exist for directors to receive specialized training in program administration. When in-service training is made available, it is usually fragmented, seldom addresses directors' site-specific concerns, and almost never includes follow-up.

  The lack of professional development programs for early childhood administrators that are tied to college credit and career advancement is a pervasive problem across the country.[5]

- Directors lead frenetic lives and are eager for support. Many report that they feel ill-equipped to handle the range of tasks essential for effective program administration. Time pressures make pursuing professional development difficult.

  Three-fourths of directors indicate they were not prepared for the kinds of issues they encountered when they first became directors. Directors overwhelmingly believe that they could benefit from additional support, networking, information, and training to help them do their jobs better.[6] Over one-half of directors characterize their jobs as challenging, demanding, and never-ending. Time constraints are noted as a key frustration contributing to job stress.[7]

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Continued on back page

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- Directors of early childhood programs are poorly paid. They lack the discretionary income to pay for their own professional development and their agencies rarely provide financial incentives for pursuing advanced training.

  The level of pay and benefits for directors more nearly resembles that of workers with a high school diploma in the general work force.[4] *Although the starting hourly wages for Illinois directors increased between 1992-1997, directors earn between $11-13 per hour on average.*[5] *Public funds to support training are extremely limited, sporadic, and largely uncoordinated.*[6]

- Although few incentives exist, increasing numbers of directors are pursuing college degrees and majoring in early childhood education.

  Between 1992 and 1997 the percentage of Illinois directors with bachelor's degrees increased as did the number of directors who majored in child development or early childhood education. Although college degrees are not required by state licensing standards, about 90% of Illinois directors have a college degree,[7] *approximately 72% have a four-year degree.*[1]

- Directors are deeply committed to the field of early childhood education. Many have passed up higher paying jobs in other fields because of the satisfaction they receive from working with and supporting children and families.

  Fully 80% of directors intend to remain in their administrative role for at le[illegible]e more years.[1] *Most directors are likely to leave their current positions for others within the field rather than for [illegible]gher paying jobs in related fields.*[1]

- Directors are the least likely to leave their jobs when compared with other child care personnel.

  For every 100 director positions in Illinois, 24 new directors had to be recruited and hired due to turnover over a two-year time period.[1] *Directors' reasons for leaving included: low pay, low benefits, working conditions, and personal reasons.*[1]

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Research Notes

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Investment in Directors' Training Yields Big Payoffs

In the business world there are two commonly accepted beliefs. One, successful businesses are run by skilled managers. Second, good managers are not born but made. The same may be said of quality child care centers. New research from the Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University indicates that well-trained directors run higher quality programs and that the more training a director has the better the outcomes in improved program quality.

Evaluation data from two models of director training are presented here. The first model was a one-year, six semester hour management and leadership training program providing 100 contact hours to training participants. The training included a week-long residential institute, two weekend retreats, and mentoring assistance in implementing a Program Improvement Plan. The second model of director training was a master's degree program conducted over a 24-month period with 32 semester hours of graduate credit. This model included weekly class sessions as well as technical assistance provided by a field supervisor.

Even a one-year training program boosts directors' confidence and positively impacts program quality.

Evaluation data from the two models provide rich evidence of the powerful effect of professional development on directors' perceptions of competence as well as improved organizational climate and classroom teaching practices. As the following discussion will illustrate, larger investments in longer training programs lead to even greater gains in program quality.

Improvements in Directors' Perceptions of Competence

- Directors who participated in a year-long training program reported significant gains ($p < .05$) in their level of perceived competence in all 24 knowledge and skill areas measured by the Training Needs Assessment Survey. Differences in pretest and posttest assessments were found to be highly significant in 19 of the 24 areas measured.

- Results from the master's degree model were even more remarkable. An analysis of directors' perceptions of competence revealed an increase in the mean scores in all 30 areas measured on the Training Needs Assessment Survey. These results were found to be highly significant in 25 of the 30 areas measured ($p < .01$).

These findings demonstrate that management training for child care center directors contributes to increased feelings of self-efficacy and competence. Even a one-year training program boosts directors' confidence and impacts program quality.

Improvements in Organizational Climate

- *The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* was administered to the teaching and support staff of the participants in both the year-long and master's degree programs to measure their perceptions of ten dimensions of organizational climate (collegiality, opportunities for professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision-making structure, goal consensus, task orientation, physical setting, and innovativeness) as well as staff's perceived level of current and desired decision-making influence. Evaluation data from the year-long training revealed an increase in positive perceptions in nine of the ten dimensions measured. Improvements in one area (professional growth) were found to be significant ($p < .01$). Further, overall climate improved significantly between the pretest and posttest administrations ($p < .01$). This was not expected given the short duration of the training. Additional analysis of programs that had sent more than one administrator to the training revealed significant improvements in the areas of professional growth and clarity as well.

Continued on back page

ED 027247

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- Evaluation data from the master's degree program show even stronger results. As a result of the training program, improvements in organizational climate were found in all ten dimensions. Improvements in four of the ten dimensions were found to be statistically significant. Significant increases in staff's level of desired decision making were also noted.

These findings corroborate the belief that director training over longer periods of time with sustained support leads to higher quality programs. In this instance, improved quality of work life for child care staff is the indicator of quality. Quality of work life for staff has been found to correlate with other indices of quality in early childhood programs.

Improvements in Classroom Quality

Improvements in program quality were also found at the classroom level in both the one-year and two-year training models.

- When classroom observations were conducted (using a modified version of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Scale) in programs participating in the year-long training, improvements in classroom quality were noted in all four areas (interactions among staff and children; curriculum; health, safety, and nutrition; and physical environment). In the area of health, safety, and nutrition as well as overall quality these improvements were statistically significant. Improvements at the classroom level were not anticipated because the training was focused on administrators rather than classroom teachers. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that a "trickle down" of information from directors to classroom teachers occurred even in the one-year training model.

The greater the investment of training dollars, the better the outcomes for programs.

- More remarkable, in the evaluation of the two-year training model statistically significant differences were found in all four subscales of classroom quality—interactions among staff and children, curriculum, health, safety, and nutrition, and physical environment, as well as overall classroom quality.

Director training makes a difference in the lives of children enrolled in early childhood programs. Evaluation data from these one-year and two-year programs provide direct evidence that the amount of training is tied to better outcomes for directors and their programs. The greater the investment of training dollars, the better the outcomes for programs. At a time when the Director Credential movement is taking off and discussions are focused on broadening professional development opportunities for early childhood administrators, the evaluation data summarized above provide strong evidence of the need for continued effort in this area. Supporting directors as the gatekeepers to quality is indeed a worthwhile endeavor.

For more information about the Center for Early Childhood Leadership or to order copies of these two reports, please call (800) 443-5522, ext. 5132 or visit our website (www.nl.edu/cecl).

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